

Improving guest relations with advanced IT infrastructure based on Cisco SAN architecture

Cisco MDS links Thailand's Ibis Erawan chain of hotels with new IT infrastructure to raise service efficiency, customer satisfaction and ultimately - the experience of luxury.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>Ibis Erawan Hotel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the worldwide Ibis hotel chain, owned by Accor hotels. Four hotels opened in Thailand in 2008. Expansion plans for six additional branches over the coming years <p>Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attain leading four-star hotel status by delivering sterling hospitality services to its customers Establish a central data network to manage hospitality applications of all ten branches for improved service efficiency.
<p>Solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete MICROS-certified IT infrastructure comprising server, storage, network, security and data centre applications. CISCO® MDS 9124 SAN Switches to support connectivity between servers and storage banks.
<p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliable connectivity between central servers and branch endpoints. Higher rates of data transfer within the network system Higher level of customer service efficiency and satisfaction Sufficient network resources to accommodate the information demands of upcoming branches.

Introduction

The Ibis hotel chain, a subsidiary of Accor hotels, established its first branch in Bordeaux, southwest of France. The organization has since expanded globally with its offshoots dispersed throughout Europe, America, China and Southeast Asia. Top-tier quality services and affordable prices have allowed Ibis to emerge as a formidable competitor in the global hotel industry.

In 2008, Ibis established its first hospitality base in Thailand with Ibis Erawan, a group of four hotels situated in Patong Phuket, Pattaya, Sathorn Bangkok and Samui. Being a recent member of the country's hospitality circle, Ibis Erawan is determined to provide the same level of customer service that has become a defining tradition of all Ibis hotels. Unique Ibis offerings include an 8-hour breakfast buffet, round-the-clock services, Wi-Fi connection and a 15-minute satisfaction guarantee, where customers forgo payment of their rooms if an encountered problem is not rectified by staff within fifteen minutes.

Business Challenge

The executive members of Ibis Erawan believe that an integrated information network is essential for the successful practice of the Ibis service ethic. An

exotic destination for tourists, Thailand's popularity attracts millions of international and domestic visitors every year.

An accessible, integrated system could optimize Ibis Erawan's resources to capitalize on this energetic demographic. The network would enable hospitality solutions like centralized reports, online reservation and making customer information available to all of its user branches. "We want our customers to experience a sense of efficiency and familiarity from our services - regardless of the Ibis hotel they stay in. Information sharing will reduce the time for

processing requests and allow customers to be served according to personal preference," said Khun Sirichai Bangpa, Group IT Manager, Ibis Erawan. Other mission-critical aspects of hospitality like inventory could also be effectively managed with the integrated network. Centralized reporting can administrate the enormous quantities of hotel supplies and customer demands.

Of particular concern was the upcoming addition of six more hotels. The solution would need to possess the ability to up-scale on demand to support Ibis Erawan's employees and business needs. With vast amounts of data projected to be generated by present and future hotel transactions, the solution needed to support different storage technologies and envelope them in a unified SAN structure that could expand whenever needed.

"It is important to begin right. Ibis Erawan is at a stage primed for growth, and acquiring the right resources is crucial to avoid complications during the expansion phase. Unnecessary costs can be prevented with this practical mindset," added Mr. Bangpa.

Network Solution

To meet their requirements for a next-generation network and storage infrastructure, Ibis Erawan approached Cisco partner Terabyte Net Solution Co., LTD, (Terabyte), who offered a data center solution comprising servers, storage, security, network and cabling. As an authorized reseller of Cisco solutions, Terabyte also proposed Cisco® MDS 9124 SAN switches to provide the required storage connectivity. "We were impressed with Cisco's comprehensive and market-acclaimed approach to network solutions like routing, switching, firewall and VPN," said Mr. Bangpa. The solution was completed and deployed by March 2008.

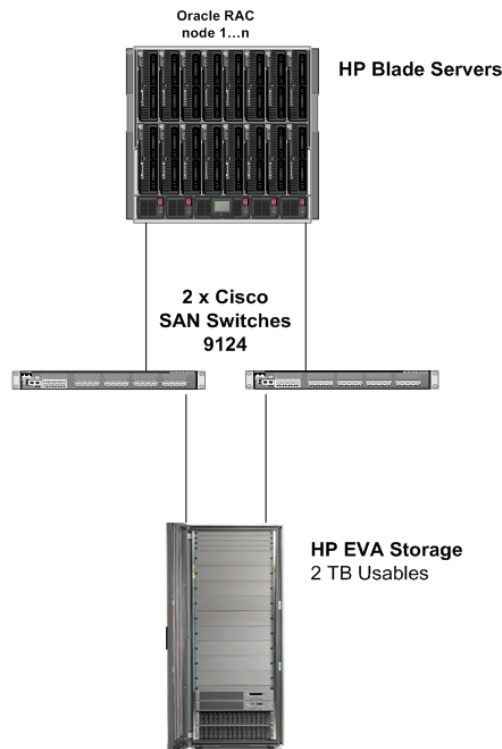


Figure 1: Diagram of Ibis Erawan's network. Each hotel houses an Oracle RAC node linked via Cisco 9124 SAN switches to the main network of storage servers.

Results

With a Cisco-connected storage network, Ibis Erawan properties are experiencing a surge of connectivity which is taking leisure and business to a higher level. The Cisco storage switches have reduced downtime in the Ibis Erawan networks. A more reliable connection ensures that discontinuities do not occur in the hotels' services. Data can be easily accessed even in the midst of software upgrades. The high availability allows customers to be served with no major lapses in service quality.

The different operation departments are also leveraging on the new features introduced by the Cisco network. Server-endpoint connections are stable and rapid with no significant decrease in performance. Web browsers can now post reports and run hospitality tools, much to the convenience of staff. Inventories have become more visible, making customer requests and auditory challenges more manageable. "Our staff can easily account for hotel supplies and appropriate them to the different departments of the hotel," said Mr. Bangpa.

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- Khun Sirichai Bangpa, Group IT Manager, Ibis Erawan

Coordination between the departments have greatly improved, resulting in fluid execution of large activities like banquets or wedding events.

Unifying information storage has proven to be very cost-effective. Entire bulks of data, including more remote components, are now kept on main servers for centralized processing. As a result, staff awareness of hotel policies and pending tasks has heightened. This and the more compact size of the IT infrastructures have saved Ibis Erawan from expenditure wastage caused by redundancies and human error.

Security features built in to the Cisco MDS 9124 SAN switches also support the network's protection against malicious influences. The innate encryption and authentication protocols help dissuade or hamper attackers who attempt to steal valuable information.

Next Steps

Ibis Erawan now has the appropriate resources to handle the bandwidth pressure of its upcoming properties. The Cisco MDS 9124 SAN switches give the current network the much-needed flexibility for future up-scaling. "Cisco's pay-as-you-grow strategy allows us to purchase the exact number of extra ports we need at a given point of time. Ibis Erawan can pace its budget comfortably throughout specific points of its development," said Mr. Bangpa.

PRODUCT LIST

- Cisco MDS 9124 SAN switches at co-location (up to 10 hotels)
- Cisco router (VoIP support)
- Cisco switches

For More Information

For more information on the Cisco MDS solutions, visit: www.cisco.com/go/mds

For more information on Ibis Erawan, visit: www.ibishotel.com



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